

U.S.-Israeli Threats against Iran: U.S. Imperialist Agenda Behind the Iran “Nuclear Negotiations”

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U.S.-Israeli threats against Iran—including threats of war—commanded front-page headlines earlier this year. In recent weeks the specter of war has receded, replaced by news of negotiations, on May 24-25 in Baghdad, Iraq, between Iran and the U.S. and its allies.

Before the Baghdad talks, government officials and the media fanned speculation that a breakthrough was at hand and the clash between the U.S. and its allies and Iran could be resolved through diplomacy, without a military clash. “Experts Believe Iran Conflict Is Less Likely,” an April 30 headline in *The New York Times* read, followed on May 19 by “U.S. Officials See Promising Signs for Iran Meeting.” Many who have been concerned about the war danger were relieved and saw this as a sign that the Obama administration didn’t want war and was restraining Israel, that both countries’ rulers had “come to their senses” and realized that war would be too costly and unpredictable to wage, and/or that the earlier threats weren’t serious but designed to pressure Iran to negotiate.

The hype has so far proved illusory, and analyses downplaying the extremity of the tensions miss the underlying, driving dynamics. The May 24-25 negotiations didn’t lead to a breakthrough—or even progress toward a negotiated settlement. Quite the opposite. It revealed and sharpened the clash between the U.S. and its allies and Iran. “The setback risks future deadlock that could trigger another Mideast war,” the *Christian Science Monitor* reported. “‘I think it was a complete failure, in terms of content,’ says an Iranian diplomat. ‘The more they talk, the worse it gets.’” (“Iran nuclear talks a ‘complete failure,’ says Iranian diplomat,” May 25)

The threats by the U.S., its imperialist allies and Israel and their refusal, for decades, to cut a deal with Iran is driven by the U.S. necessity to defend and deepen its Middle East dominance. For these imperialists, Iran is an obstacle. The Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) is a reactionary theocracy with its own needs and ambitions, and has significant economic, political, geographic, and ideological strength and influence—in particular as a pole of Islamist or Islamic fundamentalist influence. Iran’s nuclear program is one key part of these broader issues. Its agenda—indeed its very existence—clashes with and is eroding U.S.-Israeli interests and hegemony across the region and beyond. So for the U.S. and Israel, it’s an impediment that must be removed.

Negotiations—A Forum for Pursuing the Compulsions of Empire

The negotiations, which are ongoing, are between Iran and the “P5+1” (the five permanent

members of the U.N. Security Council—the U.S., Britain, China, Russia and France—plus Germany). They are supposedly aimed at resolving the dispute over Iran’s uranium enrichment program. Iran claims it is enriching uranium to produce nuclear power and medical isotopes—not to make weapons. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which Iran and the U.S. have signed, upholds “the inalienable right of all of the parties to the treaty to develop research, production, and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination.”

(<http://www.un.org/en/conf/npt/2005/npttreaty.html>)

The U.S. and its allies—Israel in particular—charge that Iran has worked on nuclear weapons in the past and may still be trying to position itself to build nuclear weapons should it decide to do so.

The outlines for a deal were clear. Iran was willing to stop enriching uranium to 20 percent purity for medical isotopes used to treat cancer patients and give up its existing supply. In return, Iran demanded guarantees that other countries would supply these needs. Iran would also agree to further, more stringent inspections of its nuclear facilities to ensure that no uranium was being diverted to make weapons. In return, Iran expected the step-by-step easing of sanctions as it demonstrated that its nuclear program did not have a military dimension, and that the P5+1 would recognize its right to enrich uranium to 3 percent purity for use in nuclear power (uranium must be enriched to over 90 percent purity to be used for nuclear weapons).

However, the negotiations broke down because the U.S.-led group refused to ease sanctions or acknowledge Iran’s right to enrich uranium at all. One U.S. official said bluntly that recognizing that right is “obviously not something we are prepared to do”—a continuation of U.S. policy for decades.

Sanctions are adding to the suffering and deprivation faced by ordinary Iranians. In moments of candor, U.S. officials admit this is one of their goals: to “create hate and discontent at the street level,” as one official put it, in order to weaken the IRI. (“Public ire one goal of Iran sanctions, U.S. official says,” *Washington Post*, January 10)

Obama’s “Engagement” Policy—Instrument for “the Harshest and Most Coercive Measures Against Iran”

The U.S. negotiating stance demonstrates that its concern has never simply been preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons, much less ridding the world of nuclear weapons. For them, Iran’s nuclear program is a concentration of a larger problem: the ways the IRI is challenging U.S.-Israeli dominance. Iran’s technical ability to build a bomb—whether it made one or not—could change the regional political and military balance of power—in particular the freedom of the U.S. regional attack dog, Israel, to attack anyone, anytime. This may be one of the IRI’s objectives, as part of a broader effort to strengthen its economic-technical capabilities and its political standing, while demanding that these interests—and the regime’s permanence—be recognized by the big powers. In the eyes of the imperialists, anything that strengthens the IRI and makes it more difficult to overthrow is, to this point, a non-starter.

Former Bush officials Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett write that the U.S. negotiating position is driven by “the Obama team’s ongoing commitment to American hegemony in the

Middle East.... [I]t treats nuclear negotiations with Tehran as a venue for making the Islamic Republic surrender to American demands, not as an important element in realigning the U.S.-Iranian relationship." ("Nuclear Talks with Iran Highlight the Downsides of America's Ongoing Quest for Middle East Hegemony," May 28, <http://www.raceforiran.com/>)

The U.S. has never recognized the permanence or legitimacy of the IRI; instead its strategy over many years has been to isolate, weaken and ultimately overthrow it. This remains the case under Obama. At a recent conference on Iran, State Department officials argued openly to Iranian activists that "the US priority in Iran is not human rights violations and not public opinion in Iran. Rather, the diplomat insisted that Washington's main concern was Iran's nuclear program, its impact on the security of Israel, and avenues for regime-change. He mentioned Pakistan as an example where regime-change is no longer possible because of its nuclear capabilities." (John Glaser, "US Iran Policy Intended to Leave Open 'Avenues for Regime Change,'" May 28, Antiwar.com, citing Prof. Joshua Landis)

The Obama administration has used negotiations and diplomacy as a means of advancing those objectives—not peacefully resolving differences with other countries. A former Iranian official and member of Iran's nuclear negotiation team sums up:

"Obama has been more confrontational with Iran than any previous American president.... [T]he Obama administration has been even more hostile toward Iran than the US under George W. Bush.... While the Obama administration claimed to be seeking conciliation in 2009, they were advising allies that their outreach was designed to demonstrate that engagement with Iran would fail.... Obama's engagement policy has actually been the instrument through which the United States has adopted the harshest and most coercive measures against Iran and rallied the international community around a strategy of isolating Iran.... Taking this into account, the Obama administration is viewed by the Iranian government as having escalated the bilateral crisis between the two countries." (Asli Bali, "Iran Will Require Assurances - An Interview with Hossein Mousavian," *MERIP*, May 16)

"The nuclear summit that concluded last week between Iran and six world powers was a ridiculous charade," Gary Kamiya of Salon.com concluded. "The Obama administration never intended it to succeed. At bottom, it is an approach predicated not on achieving real progress in dealing with the Tehran regime but on overthrowing it." ("Obama's Iran Charade," May 30)

Negotiations & U.S. Diplomacy: NOT An Alternative to Imperialism, A Tool of Imperialism

In today's world, negotiations between rival powers are not driven by some universal desire for peace and understanding, to "understand the other's viewpoint," or to "see reason and avoid war." They aren't a venue for "bringing out the best" in this horrible world. Such hopes are impossible and illusory in a world dominated by capitalism-imperialism and marked by oppressive relations—in particular the strangulation and domination of oppressed countries (like Iran) by a handful of imperialist powers represented by the P5+1. In today's world, these imperial powers pursue their interests according to the compulsions of the economic-political system they represent—not the personalities of their leaders (no matter who is in office!), much less "universal principles of human rights," peace, reason, and ending suffering.

What compulsions drive the U.S. empire? The global exploitation of labor, control and access

to key resources and markets, and the military-political control of vast swaths of the globe. Why the Middle East? Because together with Central Asia it contains roughly 80 percent of the world's proven energy reserves. Whoever controls this energy spigot controls a key lever on the entire global economy—and on all powers that depend on oil and natural gas—from allies in Europe and Japan to rivals Russia and China. And this region is a crossroads for global trade and a critical military-strategic pivot.

So negotiations and diplomacy are not “substitutes” for war—they’re simply other means of advancing imperialist interests and objectives. They can—and often have been—an essential part of preparing for war by weakening, isolating and attempting to demonize an opponent—while portraying the U.S. imperialists as the reasonable party, walking “the last mile” for peace.

“A State of Low-Grade, Daily Conflict”

While mouthing hopes for a negotiated resolution of tensions, the U.S. and its allies are continuing their all-around, unrelenting assault on Iran. On April 24, the White House announced new sanctions on Iran and Syria. On the eve of the May 24-25 negotiations, both the U.S. House and Senate passed new packages of sanctions. And in Baghdad, the U.S. refused any delay in the July 1 imposition of extremely harsh sanctions on Iran's oil exports and financial dealings, including an embargo on all sales of its oil to Europe—a major Iranian market.

The week after the Baghdad talks, it was revealed that the U.S. had been waging an unprecedented secret cyberwar against Iran. “From his first months in office, President Obama secretly ordered increasingly sophisticated attacks on the computer systems that run Iran's main nuclear enrichment facilities,” *The New York Times* reported, “significantly expanding America's first sustained use of cyberweapons.” One Obama adviser said the U.S. and Iran were in a “state of low-grade, daily conflict.” (David Sanger, “Obama Order Sped Up Wave of Cyberattacks Against Iran,” June 1; Thomas Ricks, “Covert Wars, Waged Virally,” June 5)

U.S. officials—including Defense Secretary Panetta—repeated their warnings that the U.S. was fully prepared to attack Iran if need be.

Meanwhile, the regional confrontation between the U.S. and Iran and their various allies is escalating. This is particularly sharp—and very dire for the people—in Syria, where the reactionary, Iranian-backed regime of President Bashar al-Assad has murdered over 13,000 people in an effort to crush an uprising. Syria has been Iran's chief regional ally, a conduit for Iranian influence in Lebanon and Palestine, and an important line of defense for Iran against the U.S. and Israel.

The uprising in Syria is complex and involves a wide range of political forces, including both the Syrian masses as well as reactionary Islamists, pro-U.S. exiles, and former members of the regime. The U.S. is maneuvering in the situation to advance its own interests: bringing down the Assad regime and weakening Iran by depriving it of its only state ally in the region, while preventing the destabilization of the entire area. After a particularly bloody massacre in Houla, the Pentagon targeted Iran for propping up Assad and attempting to “expand its nefarious influence in the region.” (“Iranian support for Assad regime ‘needs to stop,’ Pentagon says,” *The Hill*, May 31)

Syria may be sliding into all-out civil war and the talk of U.S.-led military intervention is growing louder and louder. Leading Iranian officials counter that any Western attack on Syria would lead to an attack on Israel. ("Will Foreign Interests Drag Lebanon into a Military Conflict?" Institute for National Security Studies (Israel), June 5)

To Be Continued...Moscow, June 18-19?

All this is the stage upon which the next round of negotiations between the P5+1 and Iran, scheduled for June 18-19 in Moscow, will take place. Officials from the imperialist-led International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) continue to cast aspersions on Iran and demand access to its military sites before agreeing to Iran's demands. Iran, meanwhile, is warning it may delay or cancel the talks due to Western maneuvering and IAEA espionage.

So the trajectory toward confrontation and possible war is continuing, and sharpening. This doesn't mean war is the only possible outcome or that no agreements between the U.S.-led bloc and Iran are possible. The point is that the U.S. is proceeding from the necessities and compulsions of dealing with the challenge posed by Iran, and the vexing, multiple, colliding problems it faces in maintaining its empire of modern-day enslavement globally. These contradictions include ongoing tensions and debates between the U.S. and Israel and within the U.S. ruling class itself over how to manage all this and how to best weaken and contain Iran.

The imperialists may well hope their growing pressure will force Iran to capitulate on the nuclear issue, and that will further strengthen their other efforts to weaken and bring down the regime. Yet they also realize such efforts may fail, that it may come to war, and that if it does they need to be in the strongest possible position—militarily, politically, diplomatically and economically. Negotiations are one part of paving the way for either eventuality. After the Baghdad talks one U.S. official reportedly commented, "We are doubtful it is possible to reach an agreement with Iran, but we must exhaust the diplomatic path because the alternative, whether a nuclear Iran or a regional war, is very serious." ("Iran to face harsher sanctions despite talks," *Jerusalem Post*, May 26)

The bottom line is that should the U.S. rulers determine that their fundamental interests dictate war on Iran, then they are quite ready, willing and able to plunge the world into another savage, unjust war for domination—no matter the horrors in store for the people and the planet.

The voice of resistance and opposition to all that's represented by the imperialism of the U.S., Europe and Israel on one side and the reactionary religious fundamentalism of Iran's Islamic Republic on the other must grow louder. The only political forces on the world stage cannot continue to be these clashing reactionary and outmoded forces. Most especially, the reckless lying predators who rule this country must be resisted—and stopped.

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